DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 425 JC 940 194

AUTHOR Nuss, Elizabeth M.
TITLE Contemporary Campus Issues.
PUB DATE 8 Apr 94
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community Colleges (74th, Washington, DC, April 6-9, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Planning; Community Colleges; Cultural Pluralism; *Diversity (Institutional); *Educational Assessment; Educational Strategies; Futures (of Society); *Institutional Mission; Needs Assessment; *School Community Relationship; Student Needs; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Higher education is currently undergoing an era of low public confidence, waning commitment, and limited resources. For community colleges operating in this general context, several pressing issues can be identified. One is the need for colleges to agree on their institutional missions and priorities, determining to what extent developmental, general, transfer, and vocational preparation functions should be emphasized. Another related issue is the importance of responding to the changing values and expectations of students, as well as the changing requirements from federal, state, and local governments. A third issue is related to educating diverse and pluralistic communities, including the need to improve academic outcomes for underrepresented groups, ensure that people of color are well represented on faculty and staff, initiate institutional policies and programs that bring students together, and develop a multicultural/international ethic. Another issue facing community colleges involves fully utilizing the potential of total quality management and continuous quality improvement, while recognizing that they may not solve all of an institution's problems. A final issue is related to adequately assessing institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes and responding to the educational reforms and school-to-work reforms proposed by the Departments of Labor and Education. In any responses made, colleges must always distinguish between their essential services and expendable conveniences provided to students. (Contains 10 references.) (BCY)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 369 425

Contemporary Campus Issues.

presented by

Elizabeth M. Nuss
Executive Director
National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

April 8, 1994

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community Colleges (74th, Washington, DC, April 6-9, 1994)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. M. Nuss

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

JC 940 194

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

American Association of Community Colleges
April 8, 1994
Elizabeth M. Nuss

Contemporary Campus Issues

Introduction

Good morning. I am pleased to have an opportunity to talk with you this morning. Some of you may wonder, as I did, why someone who has no experience at community colleges was asked to talk with you about contemporary campus issues, I thought I should share a story with you.

Several years ago the president of a selective liberal arts college called to invite me to lead the discussion at their annual trustee retreat. I replied that he must be looking for another Liz Nuss since all of my experience and background was with four year public colleges and universities. He laughed and explained that he knew about my background and that was why they were inviting me. He explained that they were the experts on the college and the last thing they wanted was someone who thought they had the answers for them. What they were looking for was someone who could paint a picture of the landscape of issues, then they would apply their expert knowledge of the college in developing strategies and solutions.

So in a similar fashion I intend to describe for you what I think are some of the most pressing issues, attempt to provide a context, and share some of my biases with you. I trust that each of you are the experts on your own community college and will be able to use my remarks as a stimulus for you to develop the appropriate strategies or solutions for your college. The process of deciding which among the vast array of important issues I should discuss in the time we have together was probably the most difficult task. I am grateful to the community college leadership in NASPA for providing me with suggestions - some of which I have included!

A context

As we begin to think about some of the more pressing contemporary issues it is important to describe the context in which I think we are operating. Bill Tierney (1993) in his book Building Communities of Difference reviews the problems and challenges facing higher education. He observes "Public confidence is at an all time low, solutions seem elusive. The tenor of the debate is riddled with cynicism and despair. The sense of commitment or of common purpose is absent. The belief that post secondary education is a public good that aids in the development of the individual, community and society seems to have been lost in an age when resources are limited." Some may argue that his characterization is overly dismal, however I bet many persons in this room can identify with his observations. I know that there are times when it looks like this to me also. It is apparent to me that these circumstances might be considered the consequence of higher education having achieved -at least partially - its goal of becoming a universal public good or service. Our goals of access for all who qualify has contributed in large measure to the fact that we are now an established social institution subject to the same scrutiny and review that has accompanied other social institutions. Jim Rhatigan, Wichita State University, recently commented at the NASPA closing session that "our jobs are

difficult because the lives of the people we serve are difficult."

Contemporary issues

While the list of community college issues is incredibly long I have decided to talk about several of the ones I consider to be the most pressing. There is one very pressing topic - technology that I won't mention since that is the subject of a special focus session during the conference. The topics I will talk with you about today are:

* mission and public expectations;
* changing values, attitudes and expectations of students;
* educating a diverse and pluralistic community;
* total quality management or continuous improvement; and,
* assessment for institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Mission and public expectations.

The inability to agree on institutional mission is a problem for all sectors of postsecondary education. But this issue seems to present incredible challenges for community colleges. Raisman (1990) and others describe the tensions.

Is the mission remedial/developmental? General education and transfer education? Occupational and vocational preparation? All three? In what level or degree of importance?

To what extent are the missions of the sector of community colleges similar and to what extent is the mission of the college distinctly related to the community in which it serves?

Related to the issue of what is the college's mission is the question - who will determine the mission? Is that to be done by faculty, academic leaders, and governing boards or will it be determined by state and local governments? And now, maybe the federal government? Ideally, we might hope that the process would be a collaborative and joint effort determined by the specific needs of the community in which consensus is amicably. That is an ideal rarely achieved - since the needs of our communities are so diverse and our communities are so needy. The needs of our communities are changing and changing rapidly. This requires the college to be flexible and adaptive.

As the mission and priorities of the college adapt to the changing demands of the community it serves, there is an incredible need to *communicate the changes* to the community it serves. The expectations and realities of our stakeholders may change more slowly. For example, as the college shifts from its role as the provider of general education and as the transfer feeder for the regional four year institution to the institution providing remedial and development education for new immigrants, high school drop-outs, and others, the public usually expects you will do both. After all, hasn't that been our historical response? ...To add new programs and areas of emphases?

The extent to which your individual college will be able to address the contemporary campus issues depends to a large degree on the clarity of the institutional mission for all stakeholders. Achieving and maintaining consensus during times of rapid change presents one of the greatest challenges. Identifying and determining more effective ways to communicate - both telling our institutional story and listening to the needs and stories of our stakeholders and constituents - is essential. Recent public opinion surveys indicate that the general public seems

to be supportive of higher education - but the level of support and the level of understanding are superficial and tenuous. When our institutions are experiencing the rapidity of change as they are today - our existing methods of communication need to be carefully assessed and modified to meet the local circumstances. For example, the use of technology, cable etc. for those stakeholders who have access to it may be exceptionally effective. However, to reach many of our constituents the use of television, radio and print media which use the native language of our constituents is increasingly essential. Identifying the influential leaders - both established and emerging - in subsets of the communities we serve requires our staff and faculty to be involved and participating in the community in which we serve.

Changing values and expectations of students.

The next major issue is related to the issue of clarity of mission and matching the mission to public expectations. The values and expectations of students are changing. Most recent reports agree that older students, part timers, and two year collegians are higher education's new majority. This isn't news to you. Students coming to your colleges are more diverse in terms of ethnic and cultural background, in terms of age, and in terms of learning needs and expectations.

A report from the Institute for Research on Higher Education notes that 85% of the older students surveyed enrolled on a part time basis, and older students are twice as likely to take a small load of one or two courses and that most estimate that it will take them 8 years or more to complete a degree. Ninety percent (90%) of the older students who work want to take more courses and achieve their degrees more quickly - but their full time jobs place constraints on their ability to schedule classes. As you know, these students rarely "shop" for a college, they go to the closest and most convenient college.

Arthur Levine (1993) has been conducting interviews on 30 campuses and reports that non-traditional students are looking for something else. He uses the metaphor that students are looking for educational boutiques rather than supermarkets. The relationship students seek from their college is increasingly more like the relationship they have with their bank. They are looking for convenience - round the clock offerings, easy accessible parking, short lines, polite, efficient staff, high quality products at low cost. That is not news to the community college, is it? You have been the pioneers in distance education, technology, and student centered learning.

True, but contrast this picture with the increased public expectation for us to be efficient, a public that is linking length of time to a degree to accountability measures. State wide boards and others concerned about costs and affordability will require us to design new delivery systems.

The process of assessing, documenting, and understanding the changing values and expectations of students occurs in a dynamic relationship with the need to match the mission with public expectations.

Changing expectations/mandates from federal, state, and local governments.

Tierney commented that public confidence in higher education was at an all time low. One might conclude that the increasing mandates from government agencies at all levels are directly related to the perception that we are not well managed or that we have not moved quickly enough to respond to new social mandates.

Public confidence in accreditation procedures - viewed by many as an "you scratch my

back and I'll scratch yours" rather than as an effective method of self-regulation - has led to increased federal regulations, the creation of SPRE's etc.

The recently enacted campus crime and safety legislation, proposed changes in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act drug-free schools, etc. are relatively new initiatives designed to make colleges pay greater attention to these issues. They are fueled by a public perception that we are not sharing enough information about the crime, sexual assault, alcohol and drug violations which occur on our campus and that we do not take sufficiently serious action against the alleged perpetrators.

I have a few observations related to many of these initiatives to share. You will note that much of what I will say here is based on what I refer to as "Nuss biases". Conclusions not necessarily grounded in research, but which over time has seemed to be true - at least to me.

1. It is essential for institutions to review their printed policies and compare them to their day in and day out procedures on a whole range of issues - sexual harassment, academic integrity, alcohol, campus safety, etc. How accurate and complete are the printed policies? Do you actually operate in the manner described? The fundamental rule is follow your own procedures. If you can't follow them or don't follow them, then begin the process of policy revision and dissemination ASAP. Look at the policies first from the perspective of what the new laws require and then based on what makes sense for your environment. Don't assume that having a comprehensive policy protects you from risk or liability. It is however safe to assume if you don't follow your own written policies that you are engaged in "risky business".

2. Pay particularly close attention to the role that alcohol and substance abuse problems play on the campus and with your students. The public image and I think the image most commonly considered about alcohol on campus is that it is primarily a problem for underage party drinkers. It is important to stress the need for alcohol and substance abuse prevention programs for all campuses. The problems of alcohol abuse for community colleges is different - fewer underage and far less visible out-of-control parties. However, many non-traditional students feeling alienated and disconnected from their environments suffer from serious forms of alcohol and substance abuse problems. The impact on their ability to successfully succeed in college is equally disastrous. The types of community education, outreach, and liaisons with community treatment and prevention programs is an important campus service.

<u>Educating a diverse and pluralistic community</u>

"Community colleges enroll the highest proportion of under-represented ethnic minorities of any postsecondary sector because of their low cost, their accessibility to commuters, and their open admissions orientation" (Koltai, 1993, p. 105). Blandina Cardenas Ramirez persuasively described four major challenges we face in attempting to provide appropriate educational experiences for ethnic minorities. The first two are ones which are most familiar to us. But let's not kid ourselves, we haven't yet achieved our goals. However, the last two challenges she described are the ones with which most of our campuses are struggling with most urgently at this time.

1. The need to reduce the gap in enrollment, persistence, degree completion, and graduation rates of persons of color and other under-represented groups.

2. The need to provide increasing numbers of persons of color serving as faculty and staff. These individuals are needed not simply as role models, but more importantly to ensure that we have a complement of perspectives which increase the capacity of the institution to

address the issues it faces.

3. Institutional strategies, methodologies, and programs that intentionally provide opportunities to bring students together so they may learn to interact and transact with each other as individuals and as groups. In order to develop the capacity to live in a multicultural world we and our students need not only to be reinforced in our individual identities, but we must be reinforced in those values and experiences we share in common.

4. The need to develop an ethic in which multiculturalism, internationalism, and globalism enable us to build a knowledge base to solve the problems resultant from inequities in our society.

I want to talk more about her third point - the need for institutions to intentionally provide opportunities for us and our students to learn to interact and transact with each other as individuals and as groups. We know the symptoms of our failures - increasing group conflict, incidents of racial harassment, cries about the separateness among groups that exists on campus... I encourage us to spend some time reflecting back on what we know about development education. Perry (1970), Widick, Knefelkamp, and Parker (1975) and Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978), and others have given us frameworks to use in developmental education, which are still very useful and instructive in helping us to teach about cultural diversity and community. The sources of challenge and support as the necessary conditions for learning included the four components of developmental instruction. The four components include: the degree of structure, degree of diversity, degree of personalism, and the degree of experiential learning. These are the essential conditions to consider as we think about the sequencing and stages of developing multicultural awareness skills and understanding. We know that a challenging and possibly overwhelming learning environment is characterized by unstructured activities, a high degree of diversity, an impersonal or unfamiliar environment and little opportunity for experiential learning. On the other hand, a supportive learning environment might be characterized by learning activities which are highly structured, with minimal or carefully sequenced exposure to diversity, and a high degree of personalism and opportunities for experiential learning.

As we consider our students, we need to think deliberately about the appropriate balance between the sources of challenge and support.

In recounting her own odyssey through higher education, Laura Rendon, concluded that it is ..."not only students who must adapt to a new culture but institutions that must allow themselves to be changed by foreign cultures" (Rendon, 1992, p. 62). She argues that "institutions must consider past experience, language, and culture as strengths to be respected and woven into the fabric of knowledge production and dissemination, not as deficits that must be devalued, silenced, and overcome." Her recommendations to address the challenges include:

1. validating and affirming students' capacities for high performance at the beginning of their academic career;

2. providing instructional opportunities for students to write about and discuss their cultural experiences;

3. providing deliberate linkages between what is taught and real life; and

4. focusing on collaborative learning and dialogue that promotes critical thinking, interpretations , and diversity of opinion.

Total Quality Management.

This topic is one which is receiving considerable attention at both two year and four year colleges. Maricopa Community College district, Bunker Hill, and many others have successful projects underway. The conference program contains several sessions devoted to this topic. Whenever asked what I think about all of the quality improvement initiatives I state that I am both skeptical and confident. That may sound confusing, but let me explain. I am skeptical that total quality or continuous improvement practices can accomplish all that some claim or that it will solve all of our problems.

However, I am confident that engaging our organizations and ourselves in the process of continuous quality improvement has the potential to heighten our awareness and commitment to continuously assessing the process of service and program delivery and to ensuring that we are, in deed, meeting the rapidly changing needs of our communities. It means that it is no longer acceptable to rely on tradition - "that is the way it has always been done."

Perhaps its greatest potential is in an area that doesn't get much attention in the literature. At time when our institutions are more culturally and gender diverse, the concepts of total quality management or continuous quality improvement provide a safe, socially acceptable way for the previously dominant culture to embrace the need for systematic change. Its emphasis on staff training and development is one of its greatest assets. The biggest challenge will be focusing on the teaching and learning process. Clearly it requires institutional leaders to "walk the talk", to demonstrate patience and avoid quick fixes which have gotten our institutions into trouble over time, and it must be integrated into all that we do - it can't be viewed as an add-on.

Assessment

AACC and the League for Innovation were among the first organizations to systematically address the need for assessing institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Your efforts in the late 1980's placed community colleges in the forefront of assessment initiatives. Early on leaders in the community college community concluded that "the missions of the community colleges were substantively different from other institutions of higher education and that these client-centered missions needed to be the focus of efforts to determine the effectiveness of community college efforts" (League for Innovation, 1990, p. vii). Many of your efforts and programs served as a model for other sectors of higher education. Laudable as these efforts have been and are - the demands for continued assessment will continue and will be reshaped by educational reforms at the K - 12 level, goals 2000, the new school to work reforms recommended by the Departments of Labor and Education, and the continued press to document satisfactory progress for recipients of Title IV financial aid. As the missions are modified and as new external requirements are enacted, there will be a need to keep the focus on the adequacy of the assessment tools and to make appropriate adjustments and changes.

Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of my remarks I needed to be fairly arbitrary about the contemporary campus issues I chose to talk with you today. There are many other critical and important issues - sexual harassment, the increasing use of violence in relationships and as a way of resolving differences of opinion, federal legislation, the list goes on and on. My decision not to focus on those issues does not imply that I don't think they are important or that they exist on your campus.

The topics I have chosen to review with you are ones which I consider to be the most pressing or most challenging. If we are successful in addressing these issues we will have made some strides in restoring or enhancing the sense of community on the campus and it may be easier for the rest of the issues to be addressed by the campus community at large.

There is one final thought I wish to leave with you. As our institutions downsize, "rightsize," or whatever euphemism we use for shrinking services, we must be able to distinguish among those programs which enhance essential educational experiences and those which offer conveniences for our students. Jim Lyons, former Dean of Students at Stanford, spoke about distinguishing between hardship and convenience. Many of you might smile, and wonder what would someone at Stanford know about hardship or even simple convenience. We can debate Stanford later. His message is key for all of our institutions. As we make choices about the range of contemporary campus issues, we should be very clear about what values drive our decisions. I urge us to keep our focus on student learning. It is after all, our reason for being. Resolving our campus issues with this goal in focus should help you identify the strategies and solutions most suitable for your college setting.

Good luck!

References

Barber, B.R. (1992). An aristocracy of everyone: The politics of education and the future of America. New York: Ballantine Books.

Beckham, E. I. (1992, Jan.) Cultural Transactions and the changing requirement for educational quality. Paper presented at the 78th annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges, Seattle, WA.

Cardenas Ramirez, B. (1994). The Evolving Meanings of Multiculturalism and Internationalism in American Higher Education. Paper presented at the 76th annual meeting of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Dallas, Texas.

Institute for Research in Higher Education. 1993. The Changing Faces of the American College Campus. Change, 25, 4, 57 - 60.

Koltai, L. 1993. "Community Colleges". In A. Levine, (ed.) Higher Learning in America: 1982 - 2000. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

League for Innovation in the Community College. (1990). Assessing Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges. California: author.

Levine, A. 1993. Student Expectations of College. Change, 25, 4, 4.

Raisman, N. (1990). Moving into the Fifth Generation. Community College Review, 18, 2, 15 - 22.

Rendon, L. (1992). From the Barrio to the Academy. In L. S. Zwerling & H. B. London (eds.). First Generation Students Confronting the Cultural Issues. New Directions for Community Colleges, 80, 20, 4. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc.

Tierney, W. G. 1993. Building Communities of Difference: Higher Education in the 21st Century. Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.